Russian UFOlogy (UFO Update, October 1993)

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Paul Stonehill was just eight years old when he met the retired pilot who would change his life. While flying over the Russian arctic, the pilot told Stonehill he had seen a disk-shaped craft following his plane so closely that his crew opened fire. Intrigued, the youngster began a lifelong quest to learn about UFOs, especially those sighted over his homeland of Kiev.

After emigrating to the United States as a teen, Stonehill kept in touch with other Russians interested in the Soviet-banned study of UFOlogy by smuggling messages through friends. Now a 34-year-old executive and naturalized U.S. citizen, Stonehill says his networking has put him in touch with scientists, military personnel, and UFO witnesses and investigators all over the former USSR. In fact, thanks to glasnost and his recently established Russian UFOlogy Research Center in Tarzana, California, Stonehill now openly acts as liaison between UFOlogy contacts in Russia and the new Commonwealth of Independent States and counterparts in the United States. "I want to provide Americans with a true picture of UFOlogy in the former Soviet Union," Stonehill comments, "and I want to help my Russian colleagues discern between tabloid UFOlogy and serious research."

Toward that end, Stonehill reviews hundreds of Russian UFO cases a year, calling some 60 percent "genuine, backed by witnesses and hard facts." In

fact, piecing together information from his Russian contacts, Stonehill says he's come up with evidence that UFOlogy was a focus of the former Soviet regime. For instance, when a large UFO allegedly plummeted to Earth outside the city of Omsk in the late 1980s, the military reportedly moved the wreckage to Moscow. "Soviet academics have confirmed that it was taken to five secret state research sites," Stonehill insists. "My sources say the Soviet government conducted secret research based on the technology devised from this crash." Based on research by underground Soviet UFOlogists such as Anatoly Cistratav, Stonehill now also suspects there must have been some joint U.S.-Soviet programs aimed at developing the so-called Star Wars technology.

Meanwhile, when it comes to fostering communication between Russian and American UFOlogists, Stonehill isn't alone. Former NASA experimental psychologist Richard Haines of Los Altos, California, recently founded the Joint USA-CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) Aerial Anomaly Federation. The Federation, including more than 160 groups throughout the United States and the former Soviet Union, will sponsor yearly meetings, translate UFO documents, and encourage collaborative scientific research into UFOs. Haines is also studying the difference between alien abductions reported in the United States and the former USSR. After hypnotizing a number of Russians in their native language, Haines has concluded that the "stories are basically the same over there, except that Russians tend to describe aliens taller than those in the West."

James Oberg, an expert on the Soviet space program and pundit on the UFO scene in the former USSR, however, takes a dim view of UFOlogy as practiced

in Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States. "They're often weirder than the weirdest American group," he comments, "because they've been living in an information vacuum for so long."

Stonehill, predictably, disagrees. Russian UFOlogists need help, not criticism, he states. A case in point: Russian researchers don't even have access to equipment for analyzing a film purported to depict a UFO hovering near Odessa last year. "Russian UFOlogists need state-of-the-art research tools," Stonehill concludes. "They need more visits from their Western colleagues and fewer debunkers on their backs."--Sherry Baker

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